

Open Research Online

The Open University's repository of research publications and other research outputs

Leading with political astuteness - a white paper. A study of public managers in Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom

Other

How to cite:

Hartley, Jean; Alford, John; Hughes, Owen and Yates, Sophie (2013). Leading with political astuteness - a white paper. A study of public managers in Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. Australia and New Zealand School of Government, Chartered Institute of Management & The Open University Business School.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© 2013 The Authors

Version: Not Set

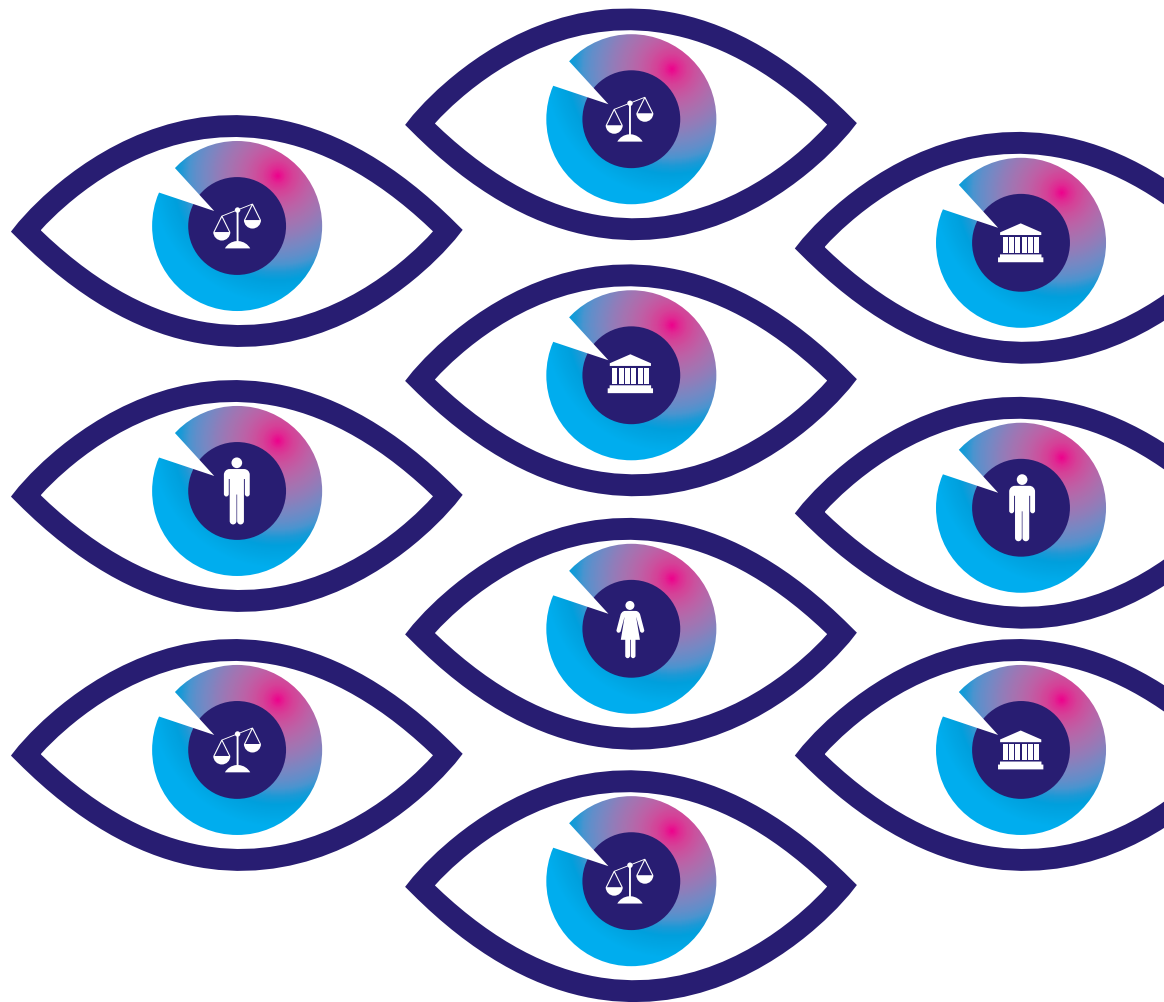
Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's data [policy](#) on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

oro.open.ac.uk

Leading with political astuteness – a white paper

A study of public managers in Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom

Jean Hartley, John Alford, Owen Hughes and Sophie Yates



Contents

3	Foreword
4	Introduction
5	Research aims and methods
6	Key findings
12	Implications for leadership
14	Conclusions
16	Recommendations
18	Appendix

Foreword

Politics is an inescapable part of working life for managers. They operate in an ever more complex world, working with stakeholders both inside and outside their organisations. Driven by differing interests, goals, incentives, values and beliefs, friction between these groups is all too frequent.

Resolving and pre-empting those issues, as many managers recognise, is the role of politics. It is inescapable. Managers must therefore – at all levels – be politically astute. They should be able to ‘read’ other people’s behaviour and grasp the wider context. They should understand the dynamics of power, and factor in politics when framing decisions and strategies.

The challenge is particularly pronounced in the public sector, which is the focus of this paper. Public managers are subject to the authority of governments, which are by definition political. At the same time they are expected to exercise ‘neutral competence’, executing policies and offering unbiased advice. Amid such tensions, political astuteness is increasingly necessary for success. Yet it remains a relatively neglected area.

In my foreword to the 2007 CMI report which was the predecessor to this work, I wrote that political skills cannot be viewed as the domain of the specialist, but are a mainstream element of leadership. Good leaders are like the Roman god Janus, simultaneously facing inward and out.

That external environment has been transformed in the intervening years, particularly in the UK where every part of the public sector has had to wrestle with the post-crash realities of austerity. The comparison in this research with Australia and New Zealand reveals some differences, but also a common need to deliver more for less.

This has only emphasised one of the defining features of the challenges we face in the 21st century. Their solutions require ever greater collaboration: within organisations, between organisations, across sectors and across nations. Yet our skills in managing such collaboration remain frankly woeful. We must learn from our experiences and bring political skills into the mainstream of what it means to be a leader.

In short, it is more important than ever for public managers to be politically astute.

Sir David Varney KT CCMl
Chairman of the Stroke Association

Introduction

This report examines an underdeveloped area of knowledge. How do public managers see politics? What is the nature of their political astuteness, in what situations do they deploy such astuteness, and how do they acquire and use political skills?

Public managers work in an inherently political environment. They must work with external bodies, institutions and stakeholders – government and civil society organisations; lobbyists and pressure groups. The growing role of outside bodies in influencing policy and delivering or co-producing services – and the requirement for managers to interact with such bodies – is a big factor in the need for political astuteness to become a priority.

Meanwhile, globalisation and uncertainties about world governance, national stability or local priorities may have unexpected repercussions. A 24-hour news cycle and ever-present social media voices demand rapid responses by governments and a keen appreciation from managers of how policy and practice are perceived by media and public audiences.

Many public managers will be familiar with the ‘wicked problem’ – one where there is little agreement about what the problem is and especially how it might be tackled. As these problems become increasingly prevalent for governments and public services, managers must be more attuned to the political challenges and tensions that go with them. How they navigate this landscape is the focus of this report.

Research aims and methods



This report builds on research first conducted across the public, private and voluntary sectors in the UK in 2006, with a focus on political awareness (Hartley et al. 2007). The public sector element of that research was the starting point for further research conducted with the Australia and New Zealand School of Government (ANZSOG) in 2010-11, with the focus shifted to a more active characterisation of political skills – from political awareness to political astuteness. The results of this three-country research are presented here. As will be seen, there were some marked difference in attitudes between British managers and their counterparts on the other side of the world. A full report on the research is also available via the ANZSOG and CMI websites.¹

The research is based on a survey of over one thousand senior and middle ranking public servants, along with 42 interviews. Seventeen of those interviews were carried out in the UK in 2012-3 with senior public servants as part of a satellite study which is being published separately (Manzie and Hartley, 2013).

The report also contains an additional review of the literature, both about politics and management in general but also politics for public managers specifically.

Research questions

The research addressed the following questions:

- What is the nature of political astuteness in public management? How important is it to public managers' work?
- What skills do they have in leading with political astuteness, and what, if any, do they need to acquire?
- In what contexts do they use political astuteness?
- Does political astuteness vary by context, type of organisation and managerial level?
- How do public managers develop political skills?

Methods

The methods used in the research were:

- Focus groups – 60 senior managers participated in six focus groups in London, Birmingham, Cardiff, Canberra, Melbourne and Wellington.
- Survey – 1,012 senior managers and some middle managers participated on-line. They came from all four UK countries, nine of Australia's ten member governments (at federal, state and territorial levels) and New Zealand's unitary government.
- Interviews – a total of 42 were conducted across the three countries.

A framework for political astuteness skills

The original UK study constructed and tested a framework of political astuteness skills, which sought to broaden the concept beyond the narrow account of 'political skills as self-interest' that is present in much management literature. The framework's five dimensions were:

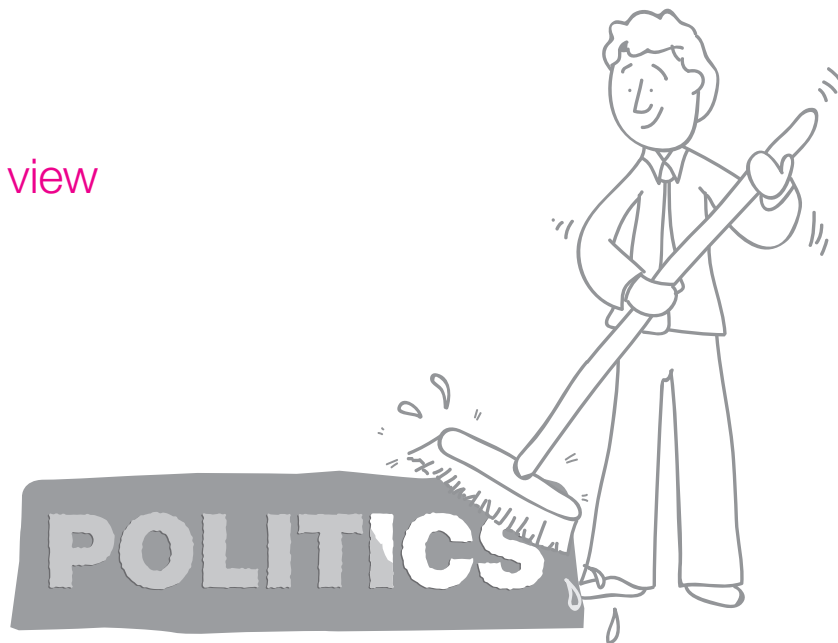
- 1. Personal skills:** Self-awareness of one's own motives and behaviour. The ability to exercise self-control is essential for managing with political astuteness.
- 2. Interpersonal skills:** The capacity to influence the thinking and behaviour of others, make people feel valued and to be able to handle conflict.
- 3. Reading people and situations:** Understanding the dynamics that can occur when stakeholders and agendas meet. Using knowledge of institutions, processes and social systems to understand what is happening or what might happen.
- 4. Building alignment and alliances:** Bringing together a mix of interests, goals and motives requires managers to recognise differences yet be able to forge collaboration.
- 5. Strategic direction and scanning:** This has two major elements. First, a sense of strategic thinking and action regarding organisational purpose. Second, thinking and sensing weak signals about longer-term issues that could impact on organisational purposes.

These dimensions are linked. Our study suggests that a leader who needs to manage complex interrelationships will need all these skills.

1. *Leading with political astuteness: A study of public managers in Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom.* See http://www.anzsog.edu.au/magma/media/upload/publication/124_LWPA-report-Hartley-Alford-Hughes-Yates.pdf or www.managers.org.uk/astuteness

Key findings

How public managers see 'politics': the aggregate view



‘Politics’ has sometimes been a dirty word – within organisations and the process of democratic governance. But our research reflected a more positive view. Managers realise that, through politics, they can learn what is required of them – politics is a means of getting things done.

The findings indicate that, overall:

- Public managers in the three countries saw the potential of politics for working in the public interest.
- A good grasp of politics enables them to assess outside factors and reconcile different interests.
- It can help them build alliances to achieve organisational objectives, rather than ones dominated by self-interest.
- Public managers tend to give more weight to the wider world than internal politics.

For the organisations they worked in, they reported that the most important factors related to the formal political world and decisions emanating from it (see Table 1).

Table 1 ‘How far do the following apply to your organisation?’
(mean figure given, based on 1-4 scale)

		AU	NZ	UK	Overall	Sig diff at .05 level
We work in a highly media-visible environment	Mean SD	3.40 .79	3.43 .73	3.37 .76	3.37 .82	
We work with a range of external partnerships	Mean SD	3.60 .58	3.53 .56	3.53 .61	3.50 .73	
We operate in a highly regulated environment	Mean SD	3.39 .66	3.3 .75	3.56 .61	3.45 .70	AU and UK NZ and UK
External perception of my organisation is a significant consideration in my work	Mean SD	3.30 .68	3.36 .66	3.28 .72	3.30 .74	
My work is directly connected to the formal political world (e.g. state/national government, parliament)	Mean SD	3.47 .73	3.59 .71	3.56 .76	3.52 .77	
Formal political decisions affect my organisation	Mean SD	3.64 .62	3.71 .51	3.78 .47	3.68 .66	AU and UK

Similarities and differences among the countries

All are primarily English-speaking countries with some shared cultural heritage and language. They have democratic governments derived from the Westminster system – political executives drawn from the legislature, and answerable to it. Interaction between politics and administration is formally broadly similar in emphasising a separation of roles between politics and administration. All three national governments have, through reform, tried to improve public sector management. But there are important differences, such as unicameral vs bicameral parliaments and the presence or absence of federal systems. These differences are compared below.

Table 2 Comparison of key institutional factors: UK, Australia and New Zealand

Institutional factor	UK	AUSTRALIA	NEW ZEALAND
Democratic elections, rule of law, free media etc.	✓	✓	✓
Executive drawn from legislature ('Westminster' system)	✓	✓	✓
Federal system		✓	
Bi-cameral parliament	✓	✓	
Electoral system enabling significant minor party representation			✓
Institutional guarantees of public service independence		✓	✓

Managers’ views about politics in their work

There were striking variations of emphasis among the three countries, as the table below reveals. The self-interest/turf protection view of politics was much stronger among British managers than their Antipodean counterparts. For instance, 17 per cent of UK managers thought politics was ‘pursuit of personal advantage’ compared with four per cent of Australian managers and only one per cent of New Zealand managers. Conversely, UK public managers put somewhat less emphasis on alliance building, scanning the environment and reconciling differences.

Table 3 Which of the following comes closest to your understanding of politics in your work as a manager?*

Purpose of politics	AU%	NZ%	UK%	Overall %	Sig diff at .05 level (chi square)
Alliance-building to achieve organisational objectives	67	71	58	63	AU and UK NZ and UK
Formal processes and institutions of government	58	62	53	56	
Pursuit of personal advantage	4	1	17	10	AU and UK NZ and UK
People ‘protecting their turf’	13	7	27	19	AU and UK NZ and UK
Scanning factors in the external environment that the organisation needs to consider	59	64	37	49	AU and UK NZ and UK
Ways in which different interests are reconciled	52	45	36	44	AU and UK

*Participants were asked to tick up to three options

Overall, however, a clear picture emerged of public managers having a much more positive view of politics in organisations than is often portrayed in management literature.

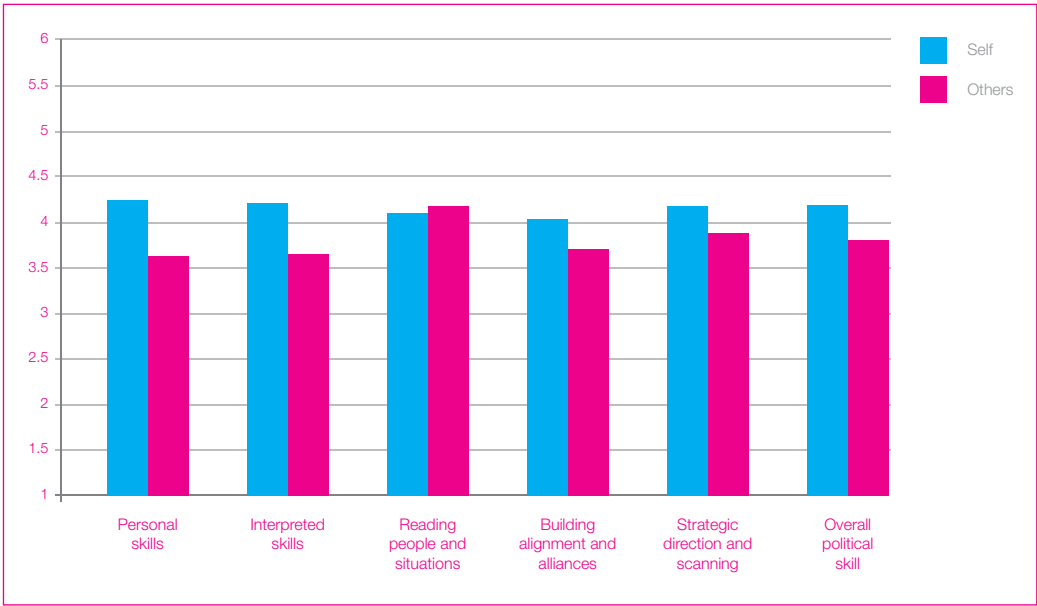
These findings were reinforced and elaborated by interviewees. They saw political skills as a way of gaining a mandate, and/or as a way of making things happen. However, the survey results varied according to managerial level. Senior managers were more likely to have a positive or neutral view of politics than to see it in terms of personal advantage or ‘turf’. Conversely, middle managers were more likely to see it in negative or neutral terms.



How politically astute are public managers?

When rating their own and their peers’ political astuteness (using the five-dimension skills framework), public managers in all three countries were fairly stern judges – both of themselves and others. However, respondents generally rated their own political skills more highly than those of fellow managers (overall, 4.16 compared to 3.84 on a six-point scale, as shown in Figure 1). Generally, they viewed their own and their colleagues’ political skills as no better than average to good, especially the ‘macro’ skills. They were a little more positive about ‘micro’ skills, but, interestingly, reported that colleagues were as good as or better in ‘reading people and situations’ – which lies between micro and macro levels.

Figure 1: Mean assessment of self and others across five domains of political skills (on a scale of 1-6)

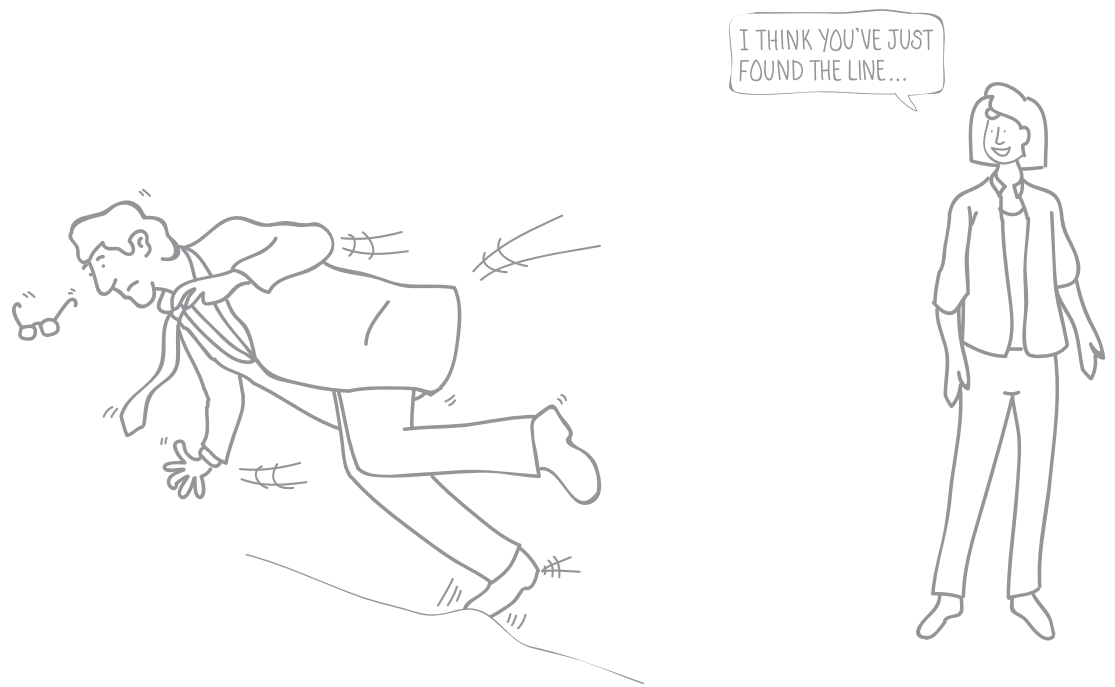


These findings were explored further by analysing demographic and other variables: management level or seniority; managers’ conceptions of politics; gender; and organisational growth.

Findings included:

- The more senior the managers, the higher they rated their own skills.
- Participants who subscribed to positive definitions of politics were more likely to rate their political skills as high than those who had negative definitions.
- Gender made no difference to participants’ ratings of their political skills.
- Participants were asked whether their organisations were declining, stable, or growing. Those whose organisations were declining were more likely to rate their colleagues’ (rather than their own) skills as low. The evaluation of colleagues was higher for those whose organisations were stable, and higher still for growing organisations.

The UK mean scores (both self-rating and rating of others) showed that public managers took a dimmer view of the effectiveness of their own and their peers’ political skills than did their counterparts in Australia and New Zealand. UK managers tended to apply harsher standards when assessing colleagues. On ‘personal’ and ‘interpersonal’ skills, they marked down colleagues more severely than did Australian or New Zealand managers.



Where do public managers deploy political astuteness?

The challenge for public managers is to judge how far they can cross the line from administration into politics without breaching democratic and procedural norms. Political astuteness can help those judgments. On the whole, public managers claimed to exercise astuteness in the context of doing their job effectively, not out of self-interest. This meant, for instance, gathering support for a particular purpose, or helping enlist people to fulfil the objective in question.

In particular public managers saw the value of being able to apply this skill within domestic politics, which they regard as an important part of their work. On average, Australian and New Zealand respondents found it more valuable to use political skills across a range of contexts than the British.

We also asked participants for the top five activities for which political skills were currently most important. From a choice of 12, these were:

- Shaping key priorities within the organisation
- Influencing external decision-makers e.g. politicians or central agencies
- Building partnerships with external partners
- Managing risks for the organisation
- Competing for resources within the organisation

The lowest ranked item among the 12 was 'Individual career advancement' and next lowest 'Reducing external criticism or negative media stories'.

The importance of political skills to public managers

Our in-depth interviews returned an overwhelming response: politics is ubiquitous and astuteness essential.

Its importance in dealing with formal politics was considered most valuable, but closely followed by its application to the less formal. 'Thinking about the impact of public opinion on your organisation' and 'working with the media' were important, as were 'working with partners and strategic alliances' and 'scanning changes in society'.

The perceived importance of organisational politics was more mixed. On the one hand, 'working with influential people in your organisation' was relatively highly rated, while 'working with cliques and power blocs in your organisation' was much less important overall.

All these findings related to ways of getting things done, with persuasion seen as vital for achieving outcomes. At a macro level, political astuteness was also seen as key in setting agendas.

How legitimate is it to deploy political skills in a democratic system?

A key issue for managers is how far they can deploy their astuteness – they need to know where the ‘line’ is between politics and administration. The majority of interviewees saw no clear line. Some felt there was a ‘no man’s land’. Some saw a shifting line, incorporating more politics or more administration at different times. Others saw a gap between rhetoric and reality.

Views varied as to whether ‘breaches’ were caused by public servants straying too far into politics or politicians having too tight a grip on the public service.

This all means that public managers must make delicate judgements about when to deliver what a minister or political leader wants – even if it is not the best option – and when to push for something better. Further complications arise from the perception that sometimes politicians did not know exactly what they wanted. Other awkward factors were the complexity of some issues, matters calling for expert knowledge besides political judgement.

How managers dealt with all this was a function of the ‘practical ethics’ each brought to the job. Problems arising from ‘crossing the line’ seemed to be dealt with pragmatically, once the assumption of a clear line was discarded and the sense of a zone adopted.

How is political astuteness acquired and developed?

Overwhelmingly, managers learnt political skills ‘on the job’: through experience gained, good or bad role models and learning from mistakes – but generally on their own. Structured approaches, such as psychometric testing, leadership books, formal mentoring or coaching, were considered less significant. Academic study also ranked lower than most ‘on-the-job’ options.

One possible explanation for this is that a degree of illegitimacy still attaches to the notion of managers exercising political astuteness (despite the evidence presented here). Consequently, it is something in which organisations may be reluctant to invest.

How can leadership skills be best acquired?

Experience alone is generally seen to be insufficient for leadership development – learning from experience is not automatic. There is the danger that inappropriate conclusions can be drawn from experience, through ‘superstitious learning’, resulting in less than effective performance.

Our findings suggest a rather hit and miss approach by organisations in developing middle and senior managers to handle complex modern organisations. Mistakes and crises are sometimes covered up, or used in blame games. There is a general consensus from researchers that many of the skills, mindsets and behaviours of leadership can be learned – acquired rather than inherited. This suggests some future paths for leadership research and for leadership development policy and practice.

Implications for leadership

This study is about **‘Leading with political astuteness’** not just being politically astute per se. Our findings provide insights into leadership beyond the political realm.

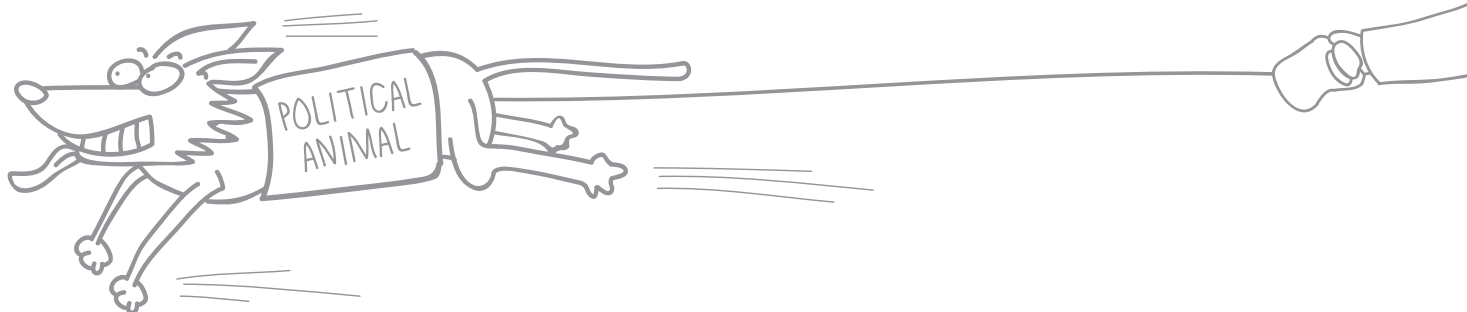
Managers who acquire political skills also, in the process, develop leadership skills. For example, interpersonal skills include the capacity to influence the thinking and behaviour of others, to secure cooperation from people over whom the manager has no line authority, and to make people feel valued.

They include ‘tougher’ skills such as the ability to negotiate, to stand up to pressures from others, and achieve constructive outcomes from conflict. These are all important in generic leadership and management. Similarly, the ability to understand the larger environment and diagnose what is really happening below the surface or over the horizon is a key capability for strategic leadership.

What is effective leadership?

The political astuteness framework helps bring new insights to understanding the tasks of leadership. Traditional theory still focuses too much on the view that building consensus and commitment, and ‘selling’ a vision to ‘followers’ counts as effectiveness. Increasingly, commentators are questioning this ‘small group’ view when applied to larger organisations, or to society, where multiple interests exist. This research supports the value of pluralistic views of leadership – something that requires a political understanding.

Arguably all managers – public or private – will be more effective if they are more aware of the stakeholders and varied interests around them. This goes beyond thinking of them just as competitors or collaborators, and takes into account a broader politics. It contrasts with the widely-held assumption that government should learn effectiveness and efficiency from the private sector. In fact, it implies the public sector might provide lessons for private business about coping with the complex forces – political, environmental and social – that have hit the corporate world in recent decades.



Why does politics matter to public managers?

Clearly, key aspects of public managers' jobs have a political dimension better dealt with if astuteness is applied. The great majority of respondents – middle, senior and very senior managers – saw the presence of politics as a given. Some talked about a particular point in the career ladder where they felt they had to start understanding the politics, a world from which they had been protected when lower down the pecking order.

It is evident that politics matters most to public managers when it allows them to get things done. In Westminster systems, decisions by ministers and other elected politicians are powerful indications of what managers can and cannot do. However, when clearly authorised, public managers have to work with others to enable policies to be understood and supported. This authority strengthens the manager's hand in dealing with other stakeholders who may have competing agendas.

How far should public managers get involved in politics?

In classical public administration theory, public sector managers should concentrate on implementing policy decisions, but stay out of making those decisions – the preserve of elected politicians. However, we found that public managers often stray into political behaviour, for example helping politicians to clarify or develop workable policies or ensuring wide consultation among key stakeholders. Senior public servants do more than simply carry out decisions handed down from ministers' offices. If that is all they did, they would struggle to fulfil their duties.

Yet, while routinely crossing the line, most public managers believe that big decisions should be made by elected politicians rather than appointed officials. Astute public servants recognise where that line is and how far they can overstep it without compromising their ethical code or committing career suicide. This entails judging the trade-off between what, in policy terms, is at stake and the risk of acting or being seen to act illegitimately. The paradox is that possessing political astuteness appears to enable managers to better judge where the line (or the zone) is.

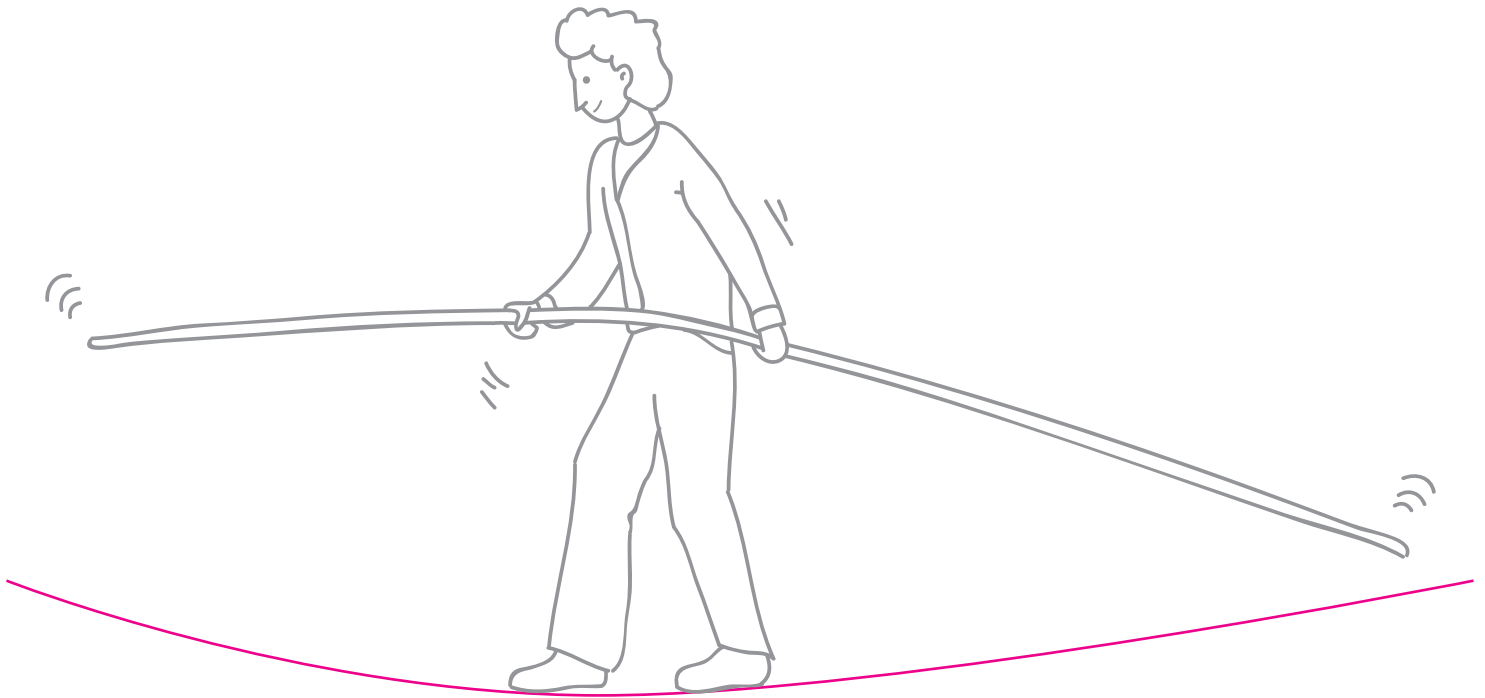
Conclusions

Politics is both complex and unavoidable for public managers. Among the perils are that politics can foster undue caution – politically safe, maybe – yet inhibiting the capacity to conceive or implement valuable policies. At the other extreme, it can lead to risky behaviour, as public managers pursue valuable policies at the cost of straying into the politician's territory.

This report has explored how public managers might better cope by becoming more politically astute. Political skill can enhance public managers' ability to:

- conceive of purposes or policies that reduce conflict while offering valuable outcomes;
- persuade other political players of their merits
- be aware of how far they can stray into the domain of their elected political masters without abusing the democratic process.

But it can also lead to gaming both by politicians and public servants, from withholding information to buck-passing. Giving bureaucrats too much licence to engage in politics might allow them to suborn democratic processes for undemocratic or venal ends.



Elected politicians and external partners are important in getting things done because they can supply or withhold the resources and support public managers need to fulfil what they understand to be their jobs. So, however widespread the view that politics can be a dirty business, the consensus among public managers is clear: political astuteness can also be a positive force. As our research has found, it can reconcile clashing viewpoints. It can also enable stakeholders with different values or goals to work together in the public interest.

Democracy can draw comfort from our finding that politically astute managers are likelier to hold a positive view of politics. Moreover, they are inclined to act in the public interest rather than selfishly when forced to enter a political world – precisely because they are astute.

Recommendations

The process of acquiring political astuteness needs to be improved. Too often, the acquisition of such skills is haphazard and based on mistakes. The opportunity to reflect on experience – perhaps talking to a boss, colleague, or mentor – is particularly valuable. But there is too little formal development of these important skills.

The evidence of this research provides a strong basis for practical action. These recommendations are set out for individual managers, for organisations, and for providers of education and training including professional bodies.

At individual manager level

- 1) Maximise your learning from mistakes and crises – and from the example of other managers – by honing your skills of observation, reflection and questioning. Mistakes, if well handled, may teach valuable lessons.
- 2) Check if your political awareness skills are as good as you think they are. Encourage feedback from all sides.
- 3) Seek the chance to observe, or play a part, in situations demanding political sensitivity; and then think analytically about how well you read people and situations.
- 4) Improve your strategic scanning skills – keep abreast with current thinking in the trade press and draw useful lessons from outside your usual network of contacts.



At the organisational level

- 1) Analyse the key contexts in which the organisation operates and check to see if you are equipped with all the necessary political skills. Make sure you are prepared for any new landscapes that emerge. Key managers should be exposed to these and all learning shared.
- 2) Consider developing political astuteness skills more systematically. This could involve managers at all levels, from team leaders up to senior executives. It might involve embedding a policy of moving managers around the organisation, exposing them to different cultures and practices and encouraging secondments in other organisations.
- 3) Develop a climate that tries to learn from mistakes and crises – a common means of gaining and honing political skills. Our findings suggested that discussion groups – formal or informal – could help foster political astuteness. It may be necessary to consider political astuteness skills across whole teams and use diagnostic methods of assessing those. Assessment tools such as the Political Astuteness Skills tool, developed on the back of this research series, can provide powerful insights – see www.managers.org.uk/astuteness.
- 4) Create a system to mentor and coach less experienced managers.

Public service commissions and training and development bodies

- 1) Examine strategies for leadership development, and ensure political astuteness skills are included. Many public sector capability frameworks in Australia and New Zealand already do address this area, especially at senior levels, though fewer in the UK.
- 2) Become more explicit about the need to develop the political dimension.
- 3) Use a political skills framework to help managers develop a language and understanding of the behaviour and qualities that enhance political astuteness.
- 4) Shape management courses so that they include learning about the political context of organisational performance. Educational organisations could include more content directed towards developing these skills.

While formal approaches are seen as less effective than the informal, we would argue – on the basis of the research evidence about leadership development – that a combination of the two could be more powerful. An academic focus on drawing lessons from day-to-day experience may help make sense of things through theoretically informed reflection. Study, or taking a qualification to gain exposure to new ideas and challenge one's own mindset, may bring benefits. Case studies and role play could bring insight into everyday experience that has long term value.

Appendix

The political astuteness framework

A crucial output of the British phase of the study was the development of a 50-item political skills framework. This was based on research with UK managers across all sectors by Hartley and Fletcher (2008). They identified the key skills of political astuteness as nominated by the managers themselves across a range of contexts.

Political Astuteness Skills assessment tool

Do you know how good your managers are politically? Political Astuteness Skills gives you the answer. It's an online leadership assessment tool, based on the framework, which measures the political skills of senior managers and identifies where performance could be improved. Using our specifically-tailored online 360° tool, feedback is subject to in-depth analysis, resulting in a one-to-one session between the manager and a specialist coach and an agreed action plan for development. Find out more at www.managers.org.uk/astuteness

The framework of political astuteness skills

Dimension	Description
Personal skills	Self-awareness of one's own motives and behaviours. Having a proactive disposition (initiating rather than passively waiting for things to happen). Ability to exercise self-control, being open to the views of others, ability to listen to others and reflect on and be curious about their views.
Interpersonal skills	Analysing or intuiting the dynamics which can or might occur when stakeholders and agendas come together. Recognition of different interests and agendas of both people and their organisations. Discerning the underlying not just the espoused agendas. Thinking through the likely standpoints of various interests groups in advance. Using knowledge of institutions, processes and social systems to understand what is or what might happen. Recognising when you may be seen as a threat to others. Understanding power relations.
Reading people and situations	Detailed appreciation of context, players and objectives of stakeholders in relation to the alignment goal. Recognising differences and plurality and forging them into collaborative action. Working with difference and conflicts of interest, not just finding consensus and commonality. Actively seeking out alliances and partnerships rather than relying on those already in existence. Ability to bring difficult issues into the open and deal with differences between stakeholders. Knowing when to exclude particular interests. Creating useful and realistic consensus not common denominator.
Building alignment and alliances	Strategic thinking and action in relation to organisational purpose. Thinking long-term and having a road map of the journey. Not diverted by short-term pressures. Scanning: thinking about longer-term issues in the environment that may potentially have an impact on the organisation. Attention to what is over the horizon. Analytical capacity to think through scenarios of possible futures. Noticing small changes which may herald bigger shifts in society. Analysing and managing uncertainty. Keeping options open rather than reaching for a decision prematurely.
Strategic direction and scanning	Strategic thinking and action in relation to organisational purpose. Thinking long-term and having a road map of the journey. Not diverted by short-term pressures. Scanning: thinking about longer-term issues in the environment that may potentially have an impact on the organisation. Attention to what is over the horizon. Analytical capacity to think through scenarios of possible futures. Noticing small changes which may herald bigger shifts in society. Analysing and managing uncertainty. Keeping options open rather than reaching for a decision prematurely.

Acknowledgements

This research was sponsored by the Australia and New Zealand School of Government (ANZSOG) and produced in conjunction with CMI. The research team comprised:

- Professor Jean Hartley, The Open University
- Professor John Alford, ANZSOG and the Melbourne Business School
- Professor Owen Hughes, The Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology
- Ms Sophie Yates, ANZSOG

The authors are also particularly grateful for the support of other universities with which they were associated for parts of the project, namely the University of Warwick and Monash University, and for the contribution of a Reference Group comprising managers from several participating jurisdictions in Australia and New Zealand including Penny Croser and Carolyn Gale (Victoria); Tanya Smith (South Australia); Diane Joseph (The Australian Capital Territory); Martin Hoffman (The Australian Commonwealth); and Alan Hesketh (New Zealand).

We also thank all of our interviewees, survey respondents and those who participated in our focus groups during the early stages of our research.

We would also like to recognise the work of Professor Clive Fletcher, co-author of the original UK survey; Dr Christoph Ungemach for assistance with statistical analysis; and Stella Manzie, researcher on the recent UK qualitative study linked to the ANZSOG research. For more information see *Dancing on ice: Leadership with political astuteness by UK senior public servants* by Stella Manzie and Jean Hartley, published by the Open University (2013).

The contribution of Petra Wilton and Patrick Woodman at CMI, who were part of the original UK study team and who helped to implement the survey for the three country study, is also recognised. CMI would like to thank all those, especially at the OU and ANZSOG, who have contributed to making this a successful partnership.

Finally, we are grateful to Andrew Mourant for his contribution in editing this white paper.

Chartered Management Institute

The Chartered Management Institute is the only chartered professional body in the UK dedicated to promoting the highest standards of management and leadership excellence. CMI sets the standard that others follow.

As a membership organisation, CMI has been providing forward-thinking advice and support to individuals and businesses for more than 50 years, and continues to give managers and leaders, and the organisations they work in, the tools they need to improve their performance and make an impact. As well as equipping individuals with the skills, knowledge and experience to be excellent managers and leaders, CMI's products and services support the development of management and leadership excellence across both public and private sector organisations.

Through in-depth research and policy surveys of its 90,000 individual and 450 corporate members, CMI maintains its position as the premier authority on key management and leadership issues.

For more information please contact the Policy and Research Department on:

Tel: **020 7421 2721**

Fax: **020 7497 0463**

Email: **research@managers.org.uk**

Website: **www.managers.org.uk**

Twitter: **@CMI_managers**

or write to us at the address below.



Chartered Management Institute

2 Savoy Court, Strand,
London, WC2R 0EZ

Registered charity number 1091035

Incorporated by Royal Charter



Certificate No FS28404

The Open University Business School

The Open University Business School is a leader in modern flexible learning and the pioneer of teaching methods that enable people to change their life goals, studying at times and in places convenient to them. It is one of a select group of schools worldwide accredited by the three leading international accrediting bodies – AACSB, AMBA, EQUIS. It is the only triple-accredited business school that specialises in flexible learning and is home to more than 23,600 MBA graduates in over 100 countries. Its MBA programme offers residential schools and face-to-face and collaborative learning options.

Research is at the heart of The Open University Business School, underpinning all activities from teaching to consultancy, advisory and policy work. Its mission is to undertake user-focused research in the fields of business, management and law that is intellectually leading and meets international standards of excellence.

The Open University is one of the top five UK universities for student satisfaction and The Open University Business School has been shortlisted in the Business School of the Year category of The Times Higher Education Awards 2013.

For more information, please see the website at
www.open.ac.uk/business-school

The Open University Business School
Walton Hall, Milton Keynes MK7 6AA
Telephone: **01908 655888** Twitter: **@OUBSchool**

Australia and New Zealand School of Government (ANZSOG)

ANZSOG is a unique consortium of all ten national and state governments in Australia and New Zealand, established as a not-for-profit company in 2002 with the vision of creating a world-leading educational institution that teaches strategic management and high-level policy to public sector leaders. The School is also home to a substantial research program that aims to deepen government, community and academic understanding of public administration, policy and management. Headquartered in Melbourne, it runs its programs at a number of locations across the two countries. In its ten years of operation, it has established a reputation for the quality of its programs and for the network-building benefits of its highly distributed virtual structure.

For further information contact the School on:
Tel: **+613 8344 1990** Email: **anzsog@anzsog.edu.au**

Copyright Chartered Management Institute ©
First published 2013

All rights reserved. Except for the quotation of short passages for the purposes of criticism and review, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior permission of the publisher.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A CIP catalogue record for this report is available from the British Library
ISBN 0-85946-493-8